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ABSTRACT

A counselling service to facilitate foreign language instruction for students desiring it was undertaken as an experiment at Cambridge University during the 1980-81 academic year. Its aims were twofold: (1) to provide a mechanism whereby students could be heard and their needs responded to, and (2) to insure that alternatives to the already available laboratory tape programs would be available for those who needed such programs. With regard to the organization of the service, it is noted that 20 languages were requested; the users represented both undergraduates and graduate students and staff. Seventy-five percent of the counsellor's time was taken up with behind the scenes activities, which included research work and report, feedback, administration, information gathering, and creation of materials. Contact time with clients included giving information and providing psychological help. There were three stages in the method, corresponding to changes in the notion of counselling. One of the negative characteristics noted for this particular counselling service is that it was too closely connected with the language laboratory. One positive aspect discussed has to do with non-native speakers on the post-graduate level. In this situation, the relationship with the counsellor was very important, particularly at the beginning. (AMH)

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COUNSELLING FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE PROGRESS REPORT ON AN EXPERIMENT

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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RESUME

Cet article rapporte une expérience qui a eu lieu à l'Université de Cambridge en 80-81. Il s'agissait de la création d'un service-conseil destiné à aider les étudiants de l'Université à apprendre les langues étrangères.

La première partie consiste en un rappel du contexte institutionnel dans lequel le projet s'est développé et explique la fonction que l'on a voulu donner à ce nouveau service.

La deuxième partie décrit en détail l'organisation du service et définit la population qui l'a utilisé. Une description détaillée du travail du conseiller est donnée.

Dans la troisième partie, on rend compte de l'évolution du service au cours de l'année et en particulier, du concept de « conseil ». On explique ainsi comment différentes catégories d'utilisateurs ont mené à la mise en place de modalités d'aide différentes.

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In this paper, we intend to report on an experiment which took place in Cambridge during the academic year 1980-1981.

In the first part, we shall briefly describe the institutional framework within which a Counselling Service (hereafter C.S.) was organized *. Then we shall report on the C.S. itself, on its audience and the distribution of its users according to categories of University members, on the way it was launched and publicized, and on the counsellor's functions and activities.

In the third part, we shall describe the evolution of the C.S. during the project and how the mode of counselling changed with different categories of users.

We shall conclude by indicating where major problems arose and what direction we would like to take in the future.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The University of Cambridge does not provide for the teaching of modern languages to non-specialists. There *are* a few exceptions : The History Faculty, for instance, organizes supervisions to prepare students for the translation paper which is a compulsory part of its degree, the Modern and Medieval Languages Faculty allows students from other Faculties to offer a translation paper leading to a 'Certificate of Competent Knowledge' (C.C.K.) and recently, the engineering department introduced a compulsory modern language component in its new experimental four-year course for production engineers.

* For a full account of the background, see E. HARDING-ESCH *The Open Access and Video Library of the University of Cambridge : Progress report and development*, to be published in May 1982 in *System*.

An independent Foundation also finances reading classes in German and Russian for scientists which attract a lot of postgraduates and staff.

It is clear however, that this is far from sufficient in a large and cosmopolitan University.

For the past 15 years, the only resource made available to non-specialists has been the open-access audio (and more recently video) library available in one of the two thirty-booth language laboratories (which are part of the linguistics department).

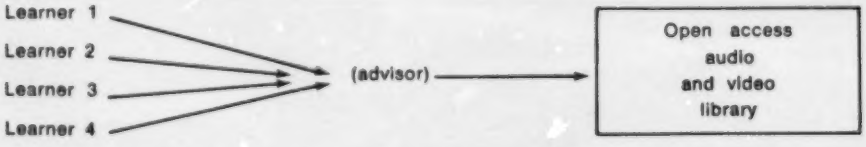
Such a system offers a number of advantages : any university member can start learning a language at any point during the year, at the times which are convenient to him/her, good language laboratory courses are available in over a hundred languages and for those sections most in use, there is a wide range of different types of courses allowing for different levels, objectives and styles of learning.

For the past few years our efforts have concentrated on the problem of *access*. This involved not only ensuring that the library was easy to use but also that users were given enough information about the materials to make considered choices when deciding on what materials to work on.

Progress in that direction was made in several ways by the introduction of demonstration tapes, booklets and so on but perhaps more importantly by making it easy for users to see the academic in charge for advice.

From an administrator's point of view, this is an ideal system : it can, in principle, meet anybody's problems since courses in new languages can be accessed if needed. It is very flexible and it is very cheap indeed since the only full-time job attached to the Open-access library is that of a secretary/ librarian.

But it is a *closed-system* the operation of which could be described as follows. (...) indicate optionality.



This diagram clearly shows the limits of the system :

By definition, it cares only for those learners who want to learn a language on a private study basis in a language laboratory.

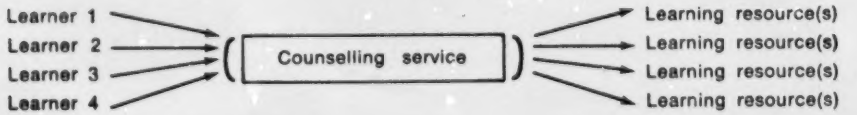
As to the advisor, his/her role is by definition limited to helping learners make choices *within* the constrainsts of the system, for instance, choosing between two courses, helping select listening materials etc...

In other words, there is no provision for learners who do not like language laboratory work, who would like to work wiht other learners, to have a chance of practising with a native speaker of the language they are learning, or those whose language needs are so specialized that there is no way a published course is going to help them.

The experimental C.S. was an attempt to create a mechanism allowing for two things : first learners would be given the chance of expressing their needs in the knowledge that what they said would be truly heard, i.e. that the answer to their problem would not *necessariliy* be a set of tapes in the language laboratory.

Secondly, the C.S. would ensure, as best it could, that the alternative suggestions for language learning activities other-than-language-laboratory-work would actually be made possible, by providing the necessary resources.

In other words, the C.S. operation was meant to turn the system described above into the following *open system,* in which the open-access library is only one of the possible learning resources.



The project was financed in the following manner. The Nuffield Foundation under the Small grant scheme for undergraduate teaching provided us with enough money to pay for a part-time research assistant who would act as the counsellor. The Mary Glasgow Trust gave us an extra thousand pounds which were used for all the other expenses, such as books, materials, payments for recordings, transcriptions and so on.

It is important to note here that, although we obviously gave a lot of thought to what was going on, this project was not meant as a research project on counselling per se. Given the time available, our main concern was to offer a new service and to operate it as best we could while trying to develop techniques which seemed appropriate.

REPORT ON THE COUNSELLING SERVICE

A. General Organisation

a) Publicity : The following handbill was printed

> **STUDENTS**
>
> If you want HELP with a language learning problem,
>
> If you want ADVICE on choosing the method most suited to your needs,
>
> If you want INFORMATION about the language facilities available,
>
> If you want TO JOIN FORCES with other learners and native speakers to do things with the language you are learning,
>
> Il you want ASSESSMENT of how you are doing,
>
> Come and consult the counsellor in the foyer of Language Laboratory 1,
> Sidgwick Site, Lecture Block.
>
> Opening times:— Monday — Friday 1 to 2 p.m.
> Monday — Thursday 5.30 to 6.30 p.m. in full term.
>
> FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING COUNSELLING SERVICE

9000 handbills were distributed in the students' pigeon holes in all colleges. Moreover, the existence of the Counselling Service was brought to the attention of tutors and directors of studies in all colleges. After this initial publicity, further advertisement was integrated with the Open days of the language laboratories which take place in October at the beginning of full term. A special video programme had been recorded by the counsellor. In that programme, she used the cases of students we had met in preceding years to explain how the C.S. could help meet a number of needs' thus developing the five 'key-words' printed in capital letters on the handbill.

b) The opening times of the C.S. for contact with users had been chosen very carefully. They corresponded to those times when attendance to the language laboratory increased.

c) The location was very unfortunate. For the first term, due to building works, counselling had to take place in the foyer of the self-access language laboratory. Then, from Christmas onwards, the counsellor was available in an office in the same building as the language laboratory. This change represented an enormous improvement, not only in terms of sheer physical comfort, but also because it materialized the fact that the C.S. was structurally independent from the language laboratory itself.

d) Mode of contact : Contact with the counsellor was left to the initiative of the user who could choose to make an appointment or simply call in during contact hours. As a result, it happened that we lost track of certain individuals, who either stopped learning completely, or were satisfied with their present methods and progress. Therefore it seemed necessary, for the purposes of reporting on the project, to send out to all who had visited the counsellor a feed-back questionnaire. 55 % of the users replied to the questionnaire.

B. General characteristics of the population

During the project, the counsellor saw 153 people. This figure is to be evaluated first taking into account that there are about 11.000 students in the University and that some 2100 students hold language laboratory tickets, i.e. 1/6th of the population.

Of these 153 users, 68 were undergraduates while 85 were postgraduates. This is an important point, in view of the fact that the postgraduate population represents less than a quarter of the total student population. However, we must note here that, for native speakers, it was the major European languages that figured most prominently, whereas for non-native speakers, interest lay mostly in English. Moreover, more than a third of the postgraduates were non-native speakers of English.

It is clear then that the student population making use of the C.S. is far from being a copy of the overall population of students in the University. Students who have language learning needs which cannot be solved by the resources of the language laboratories are postgraduates in their majority and amongst them, non-native speakers of English represent a large group.

On the other hand, the C.S. users represented the whole of the University in term of their Faculties of origin.

All faculties and departments were represented. This obviously points at the enormous variety of needs in terms of content, and at the desirability of having a highly individualized approach.

The distribution of languages studied was also representative of the University at large as measured by the requests for languages made in the

language laboratory over the past seven years. Twenty languages in all were requested. For simplification purposes in this paper, our figures for Postgraduates include all postgraduates, i.e. visiting scholars and staff as well as registered M. Phil and Ph. D. students.

C. Report on the counsellor's activities

75 % of the counsellor's time was taken up by 'behind the scenes' activities. The rest of her time was devoted to contact with the users.

a) Behind the scenes activities :

1) Research work and report. Carrying out the research involved

— the reading of the relevant literature.

— selecting methods for the elicitation of needs, and implementing them. We experimented with a worksheet to start with, then tried two different forms of grids. These are discussed in Part II.

— writing detailed case histories, not only of individual learners but also of learners working in pairs and groups.

— monitoring independent learning groups. This was a particularly difficult problem, as it raised the question of intervening and interfering with the groups, but we eventually decided the nature of the project warranted some intervention on our part.

— the preparation of the questionnaire we sent to users towards the end of the year.

— the recording of counselling sessions on cassettes, and a study of their content.

— the preparation of a first internal report around Christmas and of the Final report in June.

2) Feedback to system

— The counsellor made use of all the resources available to her and in particular of the materials already available in the language laboratories. Moreover, most of the C.S. users made use of the private study lab. She was thus able to make a number of recommendations regarding the organisation of the private study laboratory, and in particular, the information given to students during the open days, the content of the various demonstration cassettes available in the 'Square One Folder', the presentation of the documents accompanying certain tapes etc. The counsellor's recommendations were discussed and whenever possible implemented immediately. As regards longer-term

recommendations the counsellor kept a diary throughout the year, in which she noted all the problems she met as they occurred, her immediate analysis and reactions to them.

3) Administration

Apart from the initial publicity, the day-to-day running of the C.S. was under the sole responsibility of the counsellor. This involved control of the funds allocated to the C.S. by the Mary Glascow Trust, for the ordering of books, stationary, the payment of all the helpers involved in learning groups or in recording new materials in the studio, the ordering of audio and video cassettes for the materials created by the C.S. and so on. The administration of the C.S. was kept totally separate from the administration of the language laboratory in order to prevent confusions and to ensure the independence of action of the counsellor. The donkey work involved in the administration of the C.S. took 12 % of the counsellor's time.

4) Information gathering

The counsellor had to spend time gathering information about existing resources, such as language courses available abroad, examinations (Institute of Linguists Examinations, for example)... It is important here to notice that the counsellor was a former student of the Modern and Medieval Languages Faculty and consequently enjoyed the considerable advantage of knowing many of the resources available in the labs and in colleges. Much more time would be needed by a counsellor new to the University.

5) Creation of materials

Apart from the special videotape recorded at the beginning of the academic year which was mentionned earlier, the counsellor created materials whenever a request was made by a C.S. user or a group of learners and nothing suitable could be found in the laboratory or indeed when language laboratory type of materials seemed irrelevant. The materials created were extremely varied and whenever possible, students would be involved in their preparation. For instance, the worksheets intended to help an individual or group engaged in genuine communicative activities about a text were usually prepared with the student(s) conce ned and in most cases the text would have been provided by the student(s).

Towards the end of the year, an 'orientation videotape' was recorded by the counsellor in order to provide foreign postgraduates and visiting scholars with information about the Graduate Society and the University Centre while teaching them how to register and ask for information about the activities of these institutions. It also provides topics of immediate interest for a first

interview with the counsellor. This tape was presented at the one-day conference on self-access materials organized in June in the Audio Visual Aids Unit of the University.

Throughout the year, the counsellor participated in the Workshop on self-access Materials run by the Assistant Director of Research in Applied Linguistics. This workshop gave her the possibility of testing some of her materials on the members of the group.

b) Contact time activities

1) Giving information

Giving information was an important part of the pedagogical support given to users by the counsellor. She gave information about the resources available :

— the labs : the cataloguing system, the courses available, the use of the listening tapes, the cassette loan scheme facility when appropriate, but sometimes also, the operation of the booths. It is worth-while noticing here that, by doing so, the counsellor helped students who, for some reason, did not respond to the information given in the private study laboratory (most users find all the necessary information on their own) and would have otherwise abandoned using the laboratories. The availability of a human informant clearly affected the overall attendance in the private study laboratory. The number of recorded visitors increased by 12 % over the year.

— The counsellor also informed students that the C.S. could create materials on demand. These could be materials for use in the language laboratory or for loan outside when language laboratory work did not seem suitable.

— The counsellor also provided information about the C.S.'s own set of materials. She had bought a number of commercially available materials not suitable for use in the laboratories and could lend them to individuals or groups of students.

— Another area covered by the counsellor in this mini-information- centre was advice on reference materials, grammars, dictionaries, readers as well as information on possibilities abroad, not only courses available in foreign universities, but also summer jobs opportunities and such like. The counsellor also helped a number of students find information and apply for grants to go abroad. This often involved assessing the student's ability to carry out a number of tasks in the second language.

— Finally, and this turned out to be particularly useful to postgraduates looking for research opportunities abroad, the counsellor gave students information about existing examinations and helped them prepare for them.

Giving information did not only concern the language-learning resources or the available means of evaluation. Indeed, giving information on people turned out to be even more important. The liaison work involved in putting in contact students wanting to work on the same foreign language or in finding native speakers of the language studied who were interested in helping a group of learners, proved to be very rewarding indeed, although it was also time-consuming and sometimes extremely delicate.

Most of the factual information was given on the spot. When the counsellor needed to contact other institutions or had to consult catalogues or refererence documents she would ask the student to come back.

The procedure followed by the counsellor to give information on other people was as follows :

Other students studying the same language : the information would be given to an individual if a similar request had already been made and a match between the present request and the former one seemed possible. The user would be given the name and the college of the first requester and was left to take the initiative to make contact himself.

Native speakers : When a student or a group of students requested the presence or help of a native speaker of the language they were learning, the first task of the counsellor was to negotiate with the requester(s) until the profile of the native speaker needed could be formulated. Then she would try to find an individual matching this profile amongst the native speakers willing to participate. The initial meeting between parties was organised by the counsellor. She would make certain that there were no misunderstandings between the people she put in contact and more particularly about the status of the helpers/native speakers. The latter received a nominal fee and were only to partake into the group's activities. They were *not* teachers. If the group wanted a teacher, they should ask for one. The counsellor, in fact, provided qualified teachers in a number of cases when it seemed necessary. Sometimes a pair would function on the basis of an exchange of language between two partners. Lastly, some students were simply looking for a foreign friend. In order to help the group start off the counsellor would provide them with lists of possible tasks and activities. Further contacts entirely depended on the type of group and on the function of the native speaker in any given group.

It is important to notice that the counsellor never imposed her idea of how the pair or group should be constituted. She always tried to respond to the request as it had been formulated by the students and simply acted as a go-between in the first instance. This flexibility of approach was extremely

successful. Twenty-four groups and pairs came to existence during the project.

Although the 'death-rate' of the language exchange pairs was higher than that of the other categories, fifty per cent of the groups, i.e. twelve groups, met for as long as it was possible. This did not always coincide with the academic year ; a graduate would have to leave on field work or a 'native speaker' would go back home.

2) Psychological help

Much of the help offered by the counsellor was " psychological ". By this is meant that she was to be seen as a person willing to sympathise with students' problems, ready to listen to them in case of difficulty and to give encouragement and advice. When a student discussed learning habits (ways of approaching certain tasks, choices made etc...) he had a chance to find out about himself. This might lead to a change in self-perception and self-image, and yet, such a change might be made without the student feeling judged according to any pre-established criteria of " good " or " normal " behaviour. This notion of 'psychological support' proved particularly important in the case of non-native speakers. It is, in fact, this function of the counsellor which led us to envisage the counselling task differently in the case of non-native speakers of English.

In order to offer this encouraging and supportive image, the counsellor always tried to regard in a positive light the learner and his learning task. She would always point out the positive aspects of the learner's efforts, i.e. would see the amount of time spent by the learner as an indication of his/her motivation even if she believed this particular effort misguided. This simply means that as a helper she knew that if she wanted to bring the topic of the relationship between an exercise and the objective pursued, for instance, into the conversation, criticising the student's work from the outset would seem unfair to the student and would be counterproductive. This is to be seen as the direct application of " politeness rules " (Brown and Levinson 78) rather than machiavellian manipulative behaviour on the counsellor's part.

In order to ensure that she really understood what the student said during the interviews, the counsellor consciously developed a technique by which she would systematically use the student's expressions to talk about their problems and engage into successive reformulations until both were absolutely agreed that they were talking about the same thing. She found that modelling her own language onto that of the learners helped her considerably as it gave her access to the way the students saw themselves and the task, their " personal construct " (Riley 80) and consequently gave her essential clues as to what was most relevant to them at a particular moment of their learning.

EVOLUTION OF THE COUNSELLING SERVICE AND MODES OF COUNSELLING

A : Evolution

1) Methodological problems

The counsellor was trapped in the classic problem of being involved in the counselling task while taking counselling as an object of study. This fundamental problem was the reason for a number of changes in the method of data collection.

At the beginning of the project, an attempt was made to provide tools for analysis in advance. We aimed to have grids ready prepared to fill in during sessions, thus providing data for research.

For the elicitation of needs, we designed a task-sheet containing three tasks meant to reveal the type of activity students enjoyed when learning languages. The student was to complete the tasks over two weeks and then return for a second interview with the counsellor. The reaction of the student to each task and his answers to direct questions from the counsellor in the subsequent interview would be used to fill in a pre-prepared learner's profile sheet. This consisted of factual information about the learner, his previous language experience, traits of his personality, his aims in learning the language, the specification of the situation(s) in which he would use the language, and of the constraints on his learning situation.

This grid was to be the basis for the interpretation of the learner's needs and their translation into language-learning objectives by the counsellor in co-operation with the learner. To reach these objectives, the learner would be provided with a check-list of tasks leading to the acquisition of the relevant sub-skills and appropriate to the particular individual. When no match existed between the existing resources and those needed by a particular individual, we created the necessary materials. Self-evaluation would take place by the student discussing his progress through the check-list with the counsellor in further interviews. But the counsellor soon discovered that this approach was not successful with the students.

Stage 2 : After a short time, we abandoned the use of the task-sheet since students' reactions to it had been negative. By abandoning the task-sheet, we cut out the original fortnight's delay between initial contact with the counsellor and replying to questions in the second interview. The counsellor thus completed the grid in the first interview by asking direct questions.

Stage 2 was more successful than stage 1 but by the end of the first term, we were still far from satisfied with the means we had so far used :

First of all, the nature of the interview was framed by the form of the analysis grid. Counselling sessions at this time could be described as 'pre-packaged' conversations. As a result, the surface was smooth, a number of questions were asked and answered, sheets were filled in, and suggestions made. However, this meant that the language learning task was necessarily expressed in the counsellor's words. There was a standardized amount of information gathered since there was a standardized method of elicitation of that information. Again, the counsellor thought she had to change her methods as these were more project-oriented than student-oriented, and indeed, prevented her from finding out what counselling was really about.

In Stage 3, she decided to abandon the grid and, at least for a first interview, to let the student speak as much as possible. She would, of course ask questions in order to clarify certain points but if topics she thought essential did not crop up she would not force them into the conversation, taking as a principle that this was the beginning of a process and that she had to start this negociating process by focusing on what was seen as a problem by the learner rather than forcing on him/her a lot of questions which seemed irrelevant at that particular point.

While abandoning all grids during contact time, she started making extensive notes of what had happened immediately after the student had gone, trying, in particular, to keep a record of the words and expressions the learner had used and indicating all the questions which would have to be answered eventually to get a complete picture of that particular learner, the advice given, the decisions made regarding the work to be carried out, etc...

At the same time she started recording counselling sessions — with the permission of the learners — in order to be able to check that she was actually doing what she thought she was doing and to investigate the notion of 'counselling discourse'.

It was only when Stage 3 was reached that the counsellor felt she had a method of investigation appropriate to the task.

2) Evolution of the notion of counselling

The three stages mentioned above corresponded to changes in our notion of counselling. We started from 4 necessary operations, which were to be carried out by means of negociation between the counsellor and the learner concerned.

There were :

1) elicitation of an individual's learner's needs
2) interpretation of these needs and their translation into language learning objectives
3) provision of appropriate materials
4) evaluation with and by the learner.

Accordingly, we originally concentrated on the development of specific tools to carry out each of these operations in sequence and in an ordered and principled way.

By the time we reached Stage 3, we had realized that the relevant units of analysis were not a series of discrete and ordered operations but rather

— a) the event constituted by the counselling session as a whole, i.e. a particular type of conversation ;

— b) the processes triggered off by this event, or, how the counselling session could be seen to influence the user's management of the learning task betweer. sessions.

As regards counselling technique, progress does not consist in developing and using increasingly sophisticated grids — although such grids are extremely useful when one wants to specify the variables which play a part in the language learning process — but in finding ways of identifying what is seen as important and relevant to the learner at a particular moment of counselling.

In other words, far from abandoning the idea that the four operations of elicitation of needs, interpretation of needs, provision of materials and evaluation are necessary, we came to the conclusion that the problem was to cope with the fact that they took place over time and had to be seen in a dynamic fashion. New needs crop up all the time, objectives have to be redefined constantly and achievements reassessed. Good counselling has to do with being relevant to the learner if it is to be efficient. Otherwise, negociation does not take place and advice is simply not understood.

3) Consequences of this evolution

a) Consequences on the counsellor's technique for note-taking and the use of the notes in subsequent interviews.

The final procedure used was as follows :

1) During the counselling session, no notes wou'd be taken ;

2) Immediately after the student had left, the counsellor would write a list of key words at the top of a page.

The list could be said to offer an on the spot evaluation of the situation as seen by the counsellor.

The following is an example of the kind of list obtained, with a gloss explaining what it meant to the counsellor at that time. The student here is a research student in Anthropology who is learning South American Spanish from scratch, knowing only that she will go to Mexico to do her field work in four months' time. She started learning Spanish only a month before this session and works four hours daily in the labs and at home on a course. She also works with a Mexican student on a language exchange pair basis. The list goes :

1 : *enthusiasm/discouragement crucial* (this student is particularly subject to sudden bouts of despair as regards the size of the task and it affects the whole of her work) ;

2 : *measure of improvement made* (feed-back on improvement if only by means of the test units contained in the course must be formulated each time as it shows her that she is constantly improving) ;

3 : *Is it enough ?* (objectives should now be reformulated carefully as the introduction of a repair component would seem most desirable. Such a repair component would consist of learning how to ask questions about the language, how to indicate that one hasn't understood, how to make people recycle the information, etc...) ;

4 : *Narrow down areas of immediate importance* (this is related to the preceding question. In her panic, the student shows a tendency to forget the list of limited objectives agreed upon earlier and the selection of exercises recommended, and is trying to learn everything) ;

5 : *Check distribution of learning activities over time spent and satisfaction* (Again, impression that the student might feel safe simply because she spends twenty hours/week learning Spanish, but she might be wasting time and energy over certain types of exercises).

6 : *Increase listening of spontaneous Spanish* (Course far too limited. It's been decided that the student would make recordings of her sessions with the native speaker of Spanish she sees every week. This involved that their meeting place would have to change, but it is organized) ;

7 : *Activities with R. (A* reassessment of the activities carried out with the native speaker has been made. In this case, in view of the urgency of her problems, worthwhile being interventionist).

3) This list being written, the counsellor would write down about two pages on what had happened during the session. In this particular case for example.

the counsellor noticed that the student was obviously more relaxed than the preceding time and had wondered whether this was a sign that the student was either forgetting the actual difficulties of the situation she was going to face in Mexico or was attempting to counter her anxieties by working like a horse — perhaps on activities the counsellor feared unhelpful. As it turned out later in the conversation, the student now had a much clearer view of what to expect. The reduction of stress was considerable and indeed changed considerably a number of aspects in the situation of use, which were going to have consequences on the learning objectives, the climate into which the student was going to learn Spanish before her departure and, of course the type of counselling appropriate.

4) The counsellor, between two interviews, would leave her notes and would only prepare any materials judged necessary. In this case, for instance, it had been decided that an article the student had to read in Spanish would be recorded by a Mexican speaker so that she could concentrate on the pronunciation of the technical vocabulary in context.

5) Before the following counselling session, the counsellor went back to her list of key words and drew up a list of topics corresponding to the areas where there were gaps in her information (i.e. unclear meanings) or whenever inconsistencies appeared. (A typical inconsistency is that between a learning programme and objectives which have changed, as in the case evoked above ; another one would be between an 'old' programme and a sudden change in the learners' learning situation as with this Japanese visiting scholar apologizing for her laziness and 'forgetting' to mention that her husband had arrived from Japan that week and that they had moved from her College into a flat.

During the following interview, the counsellor would strive to make the student talk about those areas where inconsistencies appeared until she achieved a coherent picture of the student's present programme and its relationship to the overall objectives of the learner. In certain cases, this would be achieved, in which case there would be a momentary stage of equilibrium. More often, new elements would appear which would create new 'gaps' and the process would continue.

6) The interview technique would be as follows : after greetings, the counsellor would immediately sort out the administrative problems, i.e. give the information requested the preceding time and the materials recorded, thus stressing the fact that *she* had done her bit. At the beginning of an interview she would strive to be always welcoming and to offer a warm and friendly image. She would be at that particular point extremely attentive to the student's general attitude and state of mind. Then, she would leave the floor to the student with some kind of very general question such as 'What about you ?' thus

allowing for the student to select the first topic. We found that, by doing this, most students would use that slot to mention any major changes which would have occurred since the last session (very often the source of some kind of inconsistency in the programme). During a session, the counsellor would have a 'mental grid' in mind which consisted of the list of topics she thought necessary, and for each activity mentioned a mental checklist of FREQUENCY - EFFICIENCY - USE - ENJOYMENT ; i.e. a probing technique to obtain *factual* information about how often activities were carried out ; *self-evaluation,* on the part of the student as regards activities ; statements on the *function* of activities, and how the learner sees its relevance to the ultimate task ; *attitudinal* information and orientation of the student towards activities. The way she should carry out the interview, however, would be entirely dependent on the student's first topic and if this turned out to lead to major problems, she would delete topics form her own list accordingly to attend to what was important to the student at that moment. This was only when the relation counsellor-student had built up for some time. At the very beginning of counselling, until role-expectations are clearly established, students would tend to 'forget' extremely important points, because they thought it was irrelevant to the counselling situation.

b) Consequences on the counsellor's linguistic behaviour

1) Counsellor's speaking time

Unfortunately, we did not make recordings of our counselling sessions at the beginning of the year. We can only report that we remember that the counsellor talked a lot. She not only tried to explain to students why she was asking a number of questions which they apparently considered irrelevant and yet were too polite to comment upon, but also attempted to give as much information and advice as possible in the allocated time. In the recordings we made towards the end of the year, it is noticeable that the counsellor gives the floor to the students most of the time. The average counsellor's speaking time is half the speaking time of the students and that includes silence and pauses which are sometimes very extensive. Long pauses will often follow a probe on the counsellor's part and will usually be followed by a very informative answer.

In the following example, a Japanese research student, Y., has just mentioned that she has been working on an 'exercise book' where there are drills and exercises on English verbs but that she concentrates on the exercises :

Counsellor : ... how do you... what do you think is the difference between drills and exercises ?

Pause 30 seconds.

Y : ... well... the lady in the bookstore told me...
Follows Y.'s explanation of what she understood the difference was and counsellor's correction. It turns out in the end, that some of the drills would be extremely useful.

2) Typical speech acts

A typical sequence of earlier counselling sessions would be counsellor's direct question/student's answer or counsellor's direct question followed by silence, then by counsellor's giving information to explain the question. In later recordings we find that most of the counsellor's interventions are suggested reformulations of, and probes about what the student has been saying, often leading the student to go a step further in the analysis of the process he/she is going through.

In this example, Y. is very enthusiastic because she feels she has made a lot of progress and that she can understand a lot more. The counsellor is trying to make her formulate what this really means :

Y : ... well... I do not know, I think the books (i.e. a grammar and exercise book) really have helped.

C : ... in that you've just been able to put things you hadn't understood before into context ? Is that why it has helped you ?

Y : Yes, may be... and I do not know, well, now, I am learning to see ... try to see the... for example... how do you use a sentence and the verbs...

C : Aha ?

Y : Sometimes I've heard a verb used in a different way, different for me, that is, so I think, 'Oh look ! this is very interesting !'...

C : So you've actually got into the habit of 'listening' to people ?..

Y : Yes, but not only to take the meaning, to see the structure of the sentence as well...

C : Is this something which grew and grew or did you suddenly realize that there were lots of English people around ?

Y : Oh no. I can... for the first two months, I was trying to catch the idea and now, I feel... a little bit more... confident, so I can see not only the meaning but the structure when they speak.

C : Oh ! that's great, so, in fact, you are using the grammar book more as a reference book to explain the things you haven't understood in conversations...

Y : Yes, the book is really good... it's so 'easy' to go about it in a logical way...

Here we have a good example of the way the counsellor can help the student clarify the notion of 'progress' at that moment. The student is aware that her use of the grammar book has got something to do with her improvement but she does not know how. At the end of the sequence she has told the counsellor that i) she is memorizing constructions ; ii) she is able to identify constructions in people's speech when it does not match her representation ; iii) she is able to retain the constructions which 'surprise' her and to go and check them in her grammar ; iv) she is able to do this without losing track of what is happening in the conversation, i.e. can attend the two levels at the same time. In other words, the relation between progress and the grammar book now makes sense to the counsellor who will be able to advise her profitably on how to improve her listening-for-learning strategies.

c) Consequences on the counsellor's view of her role and of what successful counselling is

We started with the idea that the counsellor should be very competent professionnally and that the key competence consisted in analysing a learner's problems very fast in order to offer solutions and make suggestions which would make him/her learn efficiently, that is reach his/her goal quickly.

It soon became obvious that within the context of counselling such a competence is necessary but far from sufficient as advice and suggestions are simply not received and understood by the learner if the latter is not ready to receive them. The key competence then consists in being able to make one's analysis meaningful to the learner, i.e. in negociating each of its elements by successive approximation. The outcome of this negociation is that the learner finds his own solutions, that is the ones which are appropriate to his learning habits and cognitive style.

We believe that good counselling can considerably accelerate this process by using a number of techniques enhancing the counsellor/learner relationship and improving its quality. (Space does not allow a discussion of these techniques here).

d) Consequences for the learners

- Expectations.

Our original failure to see the dynamic aspect of the counselling process created a conflict between the users' and our expectations. They could not see the point of giving us so much detailed information about the situation of use of the foreign language, their learning situation and so on while we found it irritating that they should want us to suggest easy and ready-made 'recipes'. From the moment we accepted to suggest immediate action (concer-

ning most of the time an easily identifiable problem like a specific pronunciation difficulty) we realized that we were on the right track. Although we were still very far from having elicited the information we wanted for a 'proper' needs analysis, this was a first approximation to an interpretation of the learner's needs and the immediate level of satisfaction was high, until the next session offered an occasion of assessing the utility of that particular type of activity in view of the overall goal.

- Evaluation.

Our static notion of evaluation changed in favour of constant self-evaluation. Even for those users who worked with us with a specific examination or test in view, the counsellor tried to make students achieve self-evaluation i.e. make them check that they were able to do what they thought they would be able to do within a given time and how well they could do it. Checklists were very often used by the students themselves, and would be revised as counselling progressed. Self-evalution is precious to both learner and counsellor as it makes the personal characteristics of individuals appear. Some students will 'recycle' the same set of exercises until they are able to do a linguistic task 'perfectly well' (i.e. without mistakes), others will be happy to pass to something else with a much lower level of attainment. The counsellor's help in this area is crucial as she can make people see the consequences that such self-imposed criteria can have for their progress and performance.

MODES OF COUNSELLING AND CATEGORIES OF USERS

1) What is the relevant audience for a counselling service ?

For a number of reasons — the way the project was set up and financed, the people involved, the fact that the language laboratories are the only resource available to non-specialists at the moment — the counselling service was seen as a part of the Language Laboratories, and this led to confusions as to the nature of the counselling service in users' minds, particularly with undergraduates. This problem was increased by the fact that publicity for the C.S. was included in the Language Laboratories open days. This error had several negative consequences : First of all, interviews had to be very short at the beginning because of sheer numbers, secondly, it turned out that a great many students came to see the counsellor for requests which should normally be dealt with by the language laboratory secretary or the Assistant Director of Research, and most importantly, it confused the issue of who needed counselling. By the end of the first term, the picture was

clearer and the audience relevant to a counselling service appeared : it consists mainly of postgraduate students and non-native speakers.

In future years, should the experience continue, a lot of time could be gained by making it explicit that the counselling service is independent from the language laboratories. Concurrently, the counselling service should send back to the laboratories those students who only come to be given a tour of the laboratories while the laboratory staff should direct to the counsellor students who come for advice or have particular problems.

2) Modes of counselling : undergraduates and postgraduates

a) Undergraduates

The undergraduate population is homogeneous. They all share the same pattern of life in College, they are all on the spot during term, and roughly share the same time-constraints. Many are amazingly confident as regards their ability to stick to a three- or four-hour per week language learning programme and a few actually do it ! Most non-specialists undertake language learning as a treat. Their survival in the University does not depend on it. They do not learn languages with a specific purpose in mind either. Usually, they simply want to keep up their ability in the foreign languages they did in school or to start a completely new language with potential holidays abroad in mind. Under these circumstances they very rarely criticize the learning programmes available in the language laboratory as being unsuitable for their objectives and are content with the internal tests available with the courses. Very few of them are preparing for examinations external to the University or express the desire to take any.

Counselling undergraduates was easy but very time consuming. They had straightforward requests in terms of materials, information about courses and about people. A fourth of the groups and pairs were formed by undergraduates and functioned remarkably well. They did *not* want to spend time talking *in English* about their learning experience and esentially used the service as an information centre. The exceptions were students who already knew that they would need a foreign language for some special acamedic purpose in the near future.

b) Graduates and research staff

The characteristics of this group are very different. People are much more mature but aiso more humble as regards language learning. They also work under pressure and are usually highly motivated. They would not make the effort of learning a new language or acquiring new skills if it was not necessary for their academic work. Their objectives are usually very specific :

to be able to read a set of articles in their field or to talk about their research with some foreign Professor who they know does not speak English. In general they have very little time to achieve their aim. They will use what they are learning in the immediate future, and they are ready to make enormous efforts if necessary. Postgraduates would usually approach the counselling service with a very clear idea of what they wanted to concentrate on. They would expect the counsellor to give them information, to provide them with materials and exercises, to advise them on the use of dictionaries, grammars, etc... and would want expert advice on whether their course of action was sensible. They appreciated the administrative side of things since it often saved a lot of their time.

The mode of counselling would be 'non-interfering'. The counsellor would never chase a user who didn't turn up and contacts occurred when the student had a problem. Interviews also tended to be short, as in most cases, students would arrive having already formulated an evaluation of what they had done. For the great majority of them the counsellor was a kind of 'trusted supervisor' for language learning. It was efficient pedagogical support which was requested. Psychological support became important in a few cases when crisis occurred because of overwork or when tension settled in when research grants depended on language learning achievement, but it was not generally the case. Counselling seemed to be very relevant to this population and was very welcome. Of the fifty-two postgraduates who replied to the counsellor's questionnaire, only nine had stopped working in contrast to seven out of thirty undergraduates.

c) Non-native speakers of English

Although this project only permitted to study some thirty cases, it seems necessary to include a special section about students and visiting scholars who work in the University. We shall concentrate on postgraduates as we only had a very few cases amongst undergraduates. This population appears to be totally non-homogeneous. To start with, a number of them have a problem of status. Apart from the normally registered postgraduate students and 'regular' visiting scholars, there were a number of foreign people who seemed to have a variety of status. Some would be in Cambridge to work with a particular person, others would only have dining rights in a College, etc... This problem leads us immediately to a much more serious problem ; some of them had so little English that they were totally unable to tell us what their connection with the University was. They would give somebody's name, or mention a college and we had to find out about them by contacting a number of people almost at random. The helplessness and isolation of some of these unfortunate scholars is hard to describe. They had no idea of the way the University was organized and consequently had no means of even beginning to find out the information they dramatically needed. Obviously, these people needed far more, but learning English well enough to survive was an immediate and urgent need. Failing that,

they could not stay on and this would often be seen as an unbearable personal disaster. Their situation was in effect dramatic since over and above the usual 'culture shock', their inability to speak the language prevented them from being recognized for what they felt they were in their department or lab. Their usual reaction would be to stay silent, to try to smile and to be incredibly unhappy throughout the day until the time they could meet again the very few people who came from the same country, if any. In a situation so damaging for one's personality, such contacts might have been necessary for preserving their self-image, but at the same time, it created all the conditions making it likely that their English would not improve. Fortunately, there were not many of these cases, but we can only say that only a few found us or were sent to us. There are probably more of these cases at any one time than we think and it is clear that something should be done to ensure that foreign scholars who come to the University get here with a reasonable level of English.

Many non-native speakers who came to us for help however, did communicate reasonably well but needed to improve their level of proficiency, to develop study skills and to overcome a great many difficulties of adaptation.

The characteristic common to all non-native speakers was that the institution in which they were supposed to function academically was also the institution which had to teach them the language necessary to do so.

For the few isolated cases mentioned above, the counselling service was better than nothing but was also totally inadequate. What they needed was at least a month's intensive course if not three, including a lot of information about the University, Colleges, etc... and carefully prepared induction components about social life in England and in the University. The content of the orientation videotape was partly aimed at fulfilling such an aim by showing foreign students successfully registering for various societies. In order to help as much as possible within the context of the counselling service the counsellor opted for a very directive approach (even authoritarian at times). She spoke very slowly, in very simple terms, and would write down for them any factual information she gave them such as addresses, and people's names ; ... She would meet them very regularly and very often (i.e. as much as possible, given her commitments). She would make them work solidly on basic courses in the language laboratories while trying to encourage them to socialize with English speakers, and more particularly with the people with whom they had to work, to provide them with occasions of building up a social network to make them come out of their ghetto ; ... She would give them tasks to do between two meetings such as finding out the names of the people in their laboratory and asking to be introduced, for example. She spent a lot of time giving them 'psychological support', by trying to make them speak about themselves, what they were doing, and so on finding this was far from being a waste of time since it made them speak in English anyway.

For more advanced non-native speakers, counselling seemed to be particularly useful and relevant. The counsellor would not be systematically directive although she would exercise more control than with native speakers, in particular by making the appointments regular. She also experimented very successfully with a technique she called 'culture shock treatment'. She did this only when she was confident that the relationship between her and the user was well established and when she knew enough about another culture to predict which rules of conversation could lead to embarrassment. For instance, she would purposefully ask direct questions to Japanese speakers, knowing that they would 'feel' it as being rude and immediately afterwards would make them comment upon their reaction. This technique was very successful and helped foreign visitors unwind and express a lot of negative reactions they had not been able to analyse previously. She also systematically trained them to make use of the English speakers they knew to obtain information about the language to ask them to repeat what they had not understood and so on.

To train them, she would use a rare word without warning, would suddenly speak very fast or would continue talking while the telephone was ringing ; All this sounds very manipulative but was in fact very much appreciated by the counsellor's 'clients' as they soon realised that if performed appropriately, requests for repetition and such like did not disturb or offend their colleagues.

With non-native speakers, as the counsellor was often the first English native speaker who talked to them and took an interest in them and their problems, the friendly aspect of the relationship with the counsellor was very important, particularly at the beginning.

The excellent results obtained with this last group lead us to think that this form of help should be maintained for visitors to the University. However, the needs of non-native speakers are so different from those of English students that counselling for this particular group should be carried out by a specialised counsellor.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the end of this trial run we consider that the Counselling Service was successful on a number of counts. It did succeed in opening the closed system referred to at the beginning of this paper. It attracted a lot of users, and more importantly, it revealed the existence of a population whose needs were previously totally overlooked. It seems now obvious that it is a kind of service well adapted to the extreme variety of learners' needs in the University of Cambridge because of the flexibility of its approach.

However, many questions remain to be answered, of which the most important are :

1 - Although we noticed that the great majority of our users could be described as 'wholists' (Pask, 1973) we want to know precisely how the Counselling Service responded to individuals' learning styles.

2 - Although many of the Counselling Service eventually managed the learning task themselves, i.e. became autonomous (Holec, 1979) we need to have an explicit account of how counselling achieves this, as opposed to other forms of preparation to autonomy.

3 - We would also like to look at the quesion of counselling as a methodology appropriate to the implementation of a communicative curriculum (Breen and Candlin, 1980) particularly in the case of non-native speakers.

4 - Lastly, the analysis of counselling discourse should be a privileged means of looking at the difference between native speakers and non-native speakers.

Answering all the questions is beyond the scope of this preliminary report but we hope to undertake a number of pilot research projects on the counselling process which will allow us to do so.

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